



PUBLIC NOTICE

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

News Media Information: 202-418-0500
Internet: <http://www.fcc.gov>
TTY: 1-888-835-5322

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COMMISSION ANNOUNCES LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL DEAF-BLIND EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM

Washington, D.C. – The Federal Communications Commission’s (Commission) Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau (CGB) announces the launch of the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP), effective July 1, 2012. The Commission is pleased to take this affirmative step toward inclusion in our nation’s communications systems by individuals who are deaf-blind. The NDBEDP will begin to fill existing equipment and technology gaps to meet the communications access needs of this underserved population which, until now, largely has been denied the opportunity to enjoy the full benefits that these systems can provide.

The Commission established the NDBEDP in response to the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA).¹ The CVAA directed the Commission to establish a program using funding of up to \$10 million annually from the Interstate Telecommunications Relay Service Fund (TRS Fund) for the nationwide distribution of communications equipment to low-income individuals who are deaf-blind. On April 4, 2011, the Commission adopted the *NDBEDP Pilot Order*, establishing the framework for a two- to three-year pilot program to fulfill this CVAA mandate.²

Today the Commission announced the selection of 53 applicants to become certified programs authorized to distribute equipment under the NDBEDP in each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.³ A list of those entities and their contact information will be available on the Commission’s website at <http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/national-deaf-blind-equipment-distribution-program>. One entity per state is certified as eligible to receive support from the TRS Fund for the distribution of this equipment.⁴

Each NDBEDP certified entity will have primary oversight and responsibility for compliance with the Commission’s program requirements, but may fulfill its responsibilities either directly or through

¹ Pub. L. 111-260, 124 Stat. 2751 (2010); *see also* Pub. L. 111-265, 124 Stat. 2795 (2010) (technical corrections to the CVAA). Section 105 of the CVAA adds Section 719 to the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, which is codified at 47 U.S.C. § 620.

² *Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals*, CG Docket No. 10-210, Report and Order, FCC 11-56, 26 FCC Rcd 5640 (2011) (*NDBEDP Pilot Order*). The NDBEDP pilot will run for two years, with an option for the Commission to extend the program for another year. *Id.*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5649, ¶ 22.

³ The Commission had invited applications for certification to participate in the NDBEDP in September 2011. *See FCC Announces 60-day Period to Apply for Certification to Participate in the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program*, Public Notice, DA 11-1591, 26 FCC Rcd 13118 (Sept. 22, 2011). *See also* 47 C.F.R. § 64.610(b).

⁴ *See NDBEDP Pilot Order*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5646, ¶ 12.

collaboration, partnership, or contract with other individuals or entities in-state or out-of-state.⁵ In addition to the distribution of equipment, each certified program may provide and be reimbursed for the reasonable costs of related services provided to the covered population, including local outreach, individual assessments, individual training, and equipment installation and maintenance, that may be needed to effectively provide a person who is deaf-blind with the equipment that he or she needs to access the communications services covered by the CVAA.⁶ Each certified program also may obtain an allowance for certain costs associated with administering its program.⁷

Recently, the Commission also announced the selection of the Perkins School for the Blind and its affiliated partners to conduct national outreach efforts to promote the NDBEDP pilot.⁸ The Commission has set aside \$500,000 (of the \$10 million available annually for the NDBEDP) for these national outreach efforts during each year of the pilot program.⁹ The remaining \$9.5 million of annual funding will be used to reimburse certified programs for the reasonable costs of distributing equipment and providing related services to low-income individuals who are deaf-blind.¹⁰ Funding allocations for 2012-2013 are calculated by allocating a minimum base amount of \$50,000 to each jurisdiction plus a portion of the available funds based on the population of each of these jurisdictions.¹¹ The Commission announced these funding allocations earlier today.

ACCESSIBLE FORMATS: To request materials in accessible formats for people with disabilities (Braille, large print, electronic files, audio format), send an e-mail to fcc504@fcc.gov or call the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau at 202-418-0530 (voice), 202-418-0432 (TTY).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jackie Ellington, Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, 202-418-1153, e-mail Jackie.Ellington@fcc.gov; or Rosaline Crawford, Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, 202-418-2075, e-mail Rosaline.Crawford@fcc.gov.

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⁵ *Id.*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5647, ¶ 13.

⁶ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.610(f). See also *NDBEDP Pilot Order*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5659-5676, ¶¶ 45-79. Such local outreach may include, but is not limited to, the provision of information about the state-level certified program, contact information, available equipment, and ways to apply for equipment and related services provided by the program. See 47 C.F.R. § 64.610(e)(1)(vi). See also *NDBEDP Pilot Order*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5675, ¶ 79.

⁷ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.610(f). See also *NDBEDP Pilot Order*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5680, ¶ 92. On March 20, 2012, CGB conditionally waived 47 C.F.R. § 64.610(f)(2) to the extent that it only permits NDBEDP certified entities to submit reimbursement claims every six months. *Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals*, CG Docket No. 10-210, Order, DA 12-430, 27 FCC Rcd 2812 (2012) (*NDBEDP Waiver Order*) Pursuant to this waiver, certified entities may opt to submit such claims on a monthly or quarterly basis, or every six months. *Id.*

⁸ See *Perkins School for the Blind to Conduct National Outreach for the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program*, Public Notice, DA 12-910 (June 8, 2012). For this effort, the Perkins School for the Blind is partnering with the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults, FableVision, Inc., and other national and local consumer groups, parent groups, agencies, and associations. *Id.*

⁹ See *NDBEDP Pilot Order*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5675-76, ¶ 80.

¹⁰ *NDBEDP Pilot Order*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5677, ¶ 85.

¹¹ *NDBEDP Pilot Order*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5677, ¶ 84.